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THE COMPARATIVE EXHIBITION OF FOREIGN AND AMERICAN ART

All interest in art of any kind should be encouraged. It is right that people should look at pictures, even bad ones; that exhibitions should be held, even bad exhibitions. They are at least appeals to an interest in one's visual impressions. If you cannot interest people in the best, let them have what they want in the hope that they may gradually learn to appreciate the nobler expression that has been made in graphic and plastic arts.

There is no art that makes so small an appeal to the average man as the painter's or the sculptor's. The drama and music have a firm hold on the popular mind, yet I believe that neither has left a greater heritage of creative expression to mankind—that Michael Angelo has as much to give as Beethoven or William Shakespeare.

It would be difficult to imagine a handsomer or more satisfying work than that done by the ten gentlemen who formed the Society of Art Collectors, under whose auspices the Comparative Exhibition



THE FALCONER
By Eugene Fromentin
Loaned by Samuel Untermyer

of Foreign and American Art was held in the Fine Arts Gallery, Fifty-seventh Street, New York. All the expenses of the exhibition were generously underwritten, and the proceeds are to be devoted to the Eye and Ear Infirmary. It would seem, then, like a worthy enterprise, an endeavor to stimulate interest in art in general, and to arouse belief in our American art in particular, besides being a benefit to a noble charity—an enterprise dictated by motives of generosity and patriotism, an exhibition of pictures of generally high quality—in all, quite the most remarkable exhibition ever held in New York. And how was this exhibition received?

Without in any sense holding a brief for the Society of Art Collectors, for I believe there were certain grave errors in their exhibition, both of omission and commission, it seems to me that their motives have been wrongly criticised and misconstrued. All in all, this exhibition failed to arouse the interest and the sympathy that, whatever the errors, whether in name or material, it richly deserved. Had it been a poor exhibition, it should have been gratefully received for its intention. Being a great exhibition, it should have aroused enthusiasm, where it was received hypercritically or with apathy.

Grant, for a moment, that the Society of Art Collectors made an error of judgment in calling the exhibition a comparative one. Is it not commendable and encouraging that we have gentlemen who believe that what American painters are doing and have done is capable of standing with dignity beside the art of the world? Will not that belief, even though mistaken, supported by their warmth of enthusiasm and their good cold cash, stimulate the native painter, known or unknown? Is it not a step toward creating that atmosphere of which art-lovers and artists have so lamented our lack? I believe that it is. I cannot see that the comparative note is so gross an attempt to muddy the clear æsthetic perceptions of our public as some of the critics would have it seem. Every one knows who knows anything that every picture is, within its four boundaries, a world of itself, that every fine thing is unique, and must be considered as a unit, and cannot be essentially compared to any other; that a picture is great and moving, when one believes in the events or conditions that are transpiring in that world, and lives with pleasure or sorrow as the case may be in those conditions, so that they become actually part of one's experience; that great art is, as a friend of mine has it, projected soul-stuff, and souls cannot be compared. All very well; but this exhibition was not comparative in that sense. It was a comparison, and one properly and justly made, of the general artistic impulse here and abroad, a comparison of the mass of native with the mass of foreign work, not a comparison of individual men. All that the Society of Art Collectors did was to put before the public equal numbers of American and foreign pictures of the highest obtainable quality, saying: "Here are pictures recog-

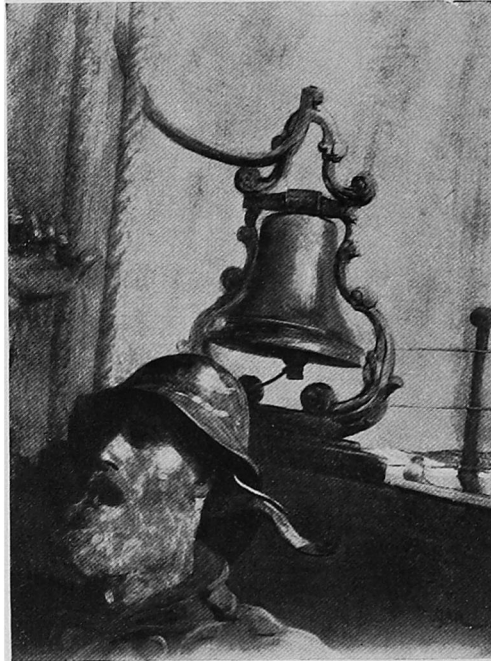
nized as of the best the past century has given us. Here is our own work. Are there not also in it the same elements of strength, sincerity, understanding, and emotion? Have we not after all an art that is vital and expressive?"

Now, even though they had been mistaken, is not this a commendable belief and enthusiasm? But they were not mistaken. The American pictures surprised even their warmest advocates. That our men in the face of a great poverty of interest have produced what they have is remarkable. Give them the atmosphere of the Medici or the Golden Age, and they, too, may produce with power and beauty. The work of the Society of Art Collectors is a step toward the creation of that atmosphere.

It is just here that the shoe pinches. The people who have been unloading great quantities of foreign pictures, good and bad, who have been stimulating and trading on the belief that there are no native painters worthy of the name, that there is no real American art, finding their props loosening, are taking refuge behind an æsthetic principle! They cry now that there can be no comparison of works of art.

They have not been so scrupulous in the past. There can be no just criticism in caviling at the motives of the Society of Art Collectors, nor at their naming of the exhibition; but they can be fairly criticised on other grounds.

In an exhibition intended to cover the art of the past century, one could not but regret the absence of at least one example of Manet (though, I understand, the committee made fruitless efforts to secure one). There were no examples whatever of the English pre-Raphaelites; if not Rossetti or Hunt, Burne-Jones or Watts might have been represented in an exhibition that made historic pretensions. I should like to have seen something of Constable and less of the Barbizon



THE LOOKOUT—"ALL'S WELL"

By Winslow Homer

Loaned by Boston Museum of Fine Arts

school; and the American pictures gave no representation to the younger element, whose work is well worthy of special distinction.

There were certain pictures of great reputation that failed to justify their claims, like Daubigny's "Apple Orchard," and one or two small river scenes. What lives most in the memory are a magnificent series



HARMONY IN GREEN AND ROSE—THE MUSIC-ROOM

By J. McNeill Whistler

Loaned by Col. Frank J. Hecker

of Monticelli that were a revelation—rich embroideries of light and color, tapestried backgrounds set with groups of figures drawn with a rare exotic charm. Millet's "The Sheep Shearers," dry, perhaps, but a wonderful picture; the energetic "Quarriers" and the studies for "The Gleaners," and "The Woman Carrying Water"; four pictures by William Morris Hunt, "The Bathers," with its sun-lit flesh, and balanced poise; "The Spouting Whale," a true piece of tone, and the "Head of the Jewess," solidly drawn and painted, and less interesting, "The Mother and Child." A

little Decamps of an "Ambuscade"; an opalescent "Venice," by Turner; Homer Martin's "Normandy Church," with its solemnity; "The Adirondacks," seen through the passing mists that trail their shadows on the mountain flanks; George Fuller's "Winifred Dysart," whose glowing face shines in a canvas full of romantic suggestion. Ryder's "Flying Dutchman," spun of such stuff as dreams are made of; a large Japanese "Moonlight," by Blakelock; a little Ribot; several beautiful Wyants; Ranger's "Noank Shipyard"; Degas's "Race-



CARITAS
By Abbott H. Thayer
Loaned by Boston Museum of Fine Arts



Course"; and the difficult scientific problem, "The Orchestra," with the illuminated stage beyond; a Renoir, with its beautiful black-and-white, and solid flesh; Twachtman's "Hemlock Pool," in the same room; a group of Homer's marines, especially the "High Cliff," almost overpowering in its swing and intensity, and ten Whistler's, including "The Nocturne, Bognor," with the boats stealthily slipping through the water, and the "Falling Rocket," with its trail of sparks, whose wavering fall is drawn so mysteriously.

Not that these are all—there was scarcely an unworthy picture in the whole exhibition. These are only what I remember best after several visits. But these criticisms, whether of name or pictures, are superficial considerations. Whatever weakness we might discover in contemporary art springs from a fault that lies deep in our modern life. We are too sophisticated, too epicurean; lacking in enthusiasms, bias, and prejudices. We walk too near the sterile plains of eclecticism; defer too much to established codes, and dare not brave criticism and seize the infinite possibilities that surround us. "For Truth and Beauty are as indigenous in Massachusetts as in Tuscany or the Isles of Greece."

PAUL DOUGHERTY.



AMERICANISM IN ART

If there was a distinctively American note in the pictures of native origin at the Comparative Exhibition lately at the Fine Arts Building, New York, it was not easily isolated by the average visitor. This was in one way disappointing, for unless such a show as this is to reveal the master key to the American art-creating temperament, how shall it be discovered?

The truth seems to be that painters on this side of the Atlantic are as diverse in aim and in expression as any other class of their fellow-citizens. Neither literature nor the drama has yet succeeded in producing a composite type of man or woman in which all Americans might feel they were at least in part embodied. The thing has come near accomplishment in England (is not Colonel Newcome the accepted national figure?), while in France the distinctive qualities might be contained in perhaps two or three personages, one of them a Midi character of Alphonse Daudet.

But in America—I am quoting my own words, by courtesy of the New York Mail and Express—crystallization has not fully taken place. The European influence, whether of direct derivation or of tradition, is still overwhelmingly strong in our art. Disregard such explicable similarity in point of view as you might see between, say, William Morris Hunt's "Jewess" and the half-length "Le Petit Gill" of Couture, who was Hunt's teacher in Paris in the early '50's; put